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Chairman Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Room 35
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

Monday, March 22, 2021

ATTN: Christopher O'Brien, Committee Clerk

AGAINST House Bill 5193 - Establishment of Charter Schools

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

My name is Chiv Heng and I live in Providence. My State Representative is Rep. David Morales. I am writing to express my **strong opposition to Representative O'Brien's bill, H-5193**, regarding charter schools.

I'm a child of Cambodian refugees, and the first in my family to be born in the U.S.; specifically in Providence. I spent the first few years of school attending Reservoir Ave School, the public elementary school located across the street from my house in South Providence. By the time I reached 5th grade, my parents already had the experience of watching my older sister struggle through public middle and high school. The advice from peers in the immigrant community was to send me to whichever private school they could afford. My parents spent precious thousands in tuition to send me to St. Matthew's, a nearby Catholic school, despite not having any connection to the community or religion. I returned to the public system when I attended Classical High School, then went on to the University of Rhode Island where I became the first, and sadly 20 years later, still the only member of my family to graduate from college.

The starkest difference between my siblings and me was the investment my parents made in those middle school years. They couldn't afford to send us all to private school, so they chose which of us they thought would be most successful. My parents didn't know much about getting their child into an elite public high School or college; it was St. Matthew's that gave me access to the process, and prepared me for the admissions exam to Classical HS. It was then Classical that provided me with a vision of going to college, and preparing me for success. And it was having a college degree that then continued to open doors of opportunity for me, ultimately leading to a successful career in public education.

The difference between me and my siblings was a choice my parents shouldn't have had to make, but at least they had the opportunity to make it for one of us. The difference between me and so many children who grow up with similar circumstances is whether any opportunity for choice exists at all. As a product of public education, I am a strong believer in improving public schools for all children. I also believe that public charter schools are part of the solution. There are thousands of children in our state who need better opportunities NOW and we can't continue to spend years battling over an imaginary perfect public system that everyone can agree on. Please oppose House Bill 5193 and let our children pursue the high-quality education they deserve.

Respectfully,



Chiv Heng